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1976/09/13



BUREAU OF
INTELLIGENCE
AND RESEARCH

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Authority NND919620

Sy EE NARA Date 4/18/77

CHINA AFTER MAO--SHORT TERM PROSPECTS

Summary

Mao left no institutionalized means for his own succession, and consequently coalition building is likely to be the order of the day. Available evidence suggests that a rough balance still seems to exist among the various contending factions in the Politburo. In the immediate future, these contending forces can be expected to present at least a facade of harmony and order, although the possibility of a relatively open power struggle, such as developed when Teng was removed after Chou's death, can not be ruled out completely.

The most likely leadership alignment in the near term is a collegial one led by individuals acceptable to major factions and institutions. It is doubtful that such a coalition would undertake any significant policy changes. Although a left-leaning and a moderate-leaning coalition are also possibilities, current divisions are such as to militate against any one faction's achieving dominance.

Political maneuvering will continue to revolve primarily around domestic issues. There is no evidence that foreign policy has been central to the leadership struggle, and all signs point to general agreement within the leadership on the current strategy of anti-Sovietism and improved relations with the West. Foreign policy will probably continue without major changes in the near future.

There are differences in emphasis, however. The left feels particularly strongly about issues involving national territory and sovereignty, and a left-leaning coalition would be more inclined than would either a moderate or a collegial one to press the US hard to break its ties with

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September 13, 1976

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Taiwan. Furthermore, a leftist coalition probably would be the least likely of the three to make a positive response to reiterated Soviet offers to improve relations, which are likely to follow Mao's death.

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The death of Mao, though long anticipated, has removed a major integrative force from the Chinese political scene. He left no institutionalized means for his own succession, and the PRC today has no leader with the prestige and authority that he or Chou En-lai had.

Procedurally, a new Chairman should be chosen by a plenary meeting of the Central Committee, or alternatively, by the Politburo itself. So far, however, there are no indications that an effort will be made in the immediate future to choose a new Chairman.

In any event, the absence of either a designated or an obvious successor to Mao suggests that:

--No plan for the succession that may have been worked out in recent months will be inviolable, even if Mao gave it his blessing.

--Leadership competition will not focus on attempting to find an individual to fill Mao's distinctive role as policy initiator or arbitrator but rather on deciding how to divide the policy domain and find an alternative means of resolving leadership disputes.

--The leadership might even retire the title of "Chairman" and expand or establish several positions which will include parts of Mao's previous powers.

--Coalition building is likely to be the order of the day, and the primary arena for this activity will be the Politburo. Nevertheless, because the Cultural Revolution legitimized appeals to groups and institutions outside the party, a faction outgunned in the primary arena may try to mobilize mass organizations and disgruntled lower-level cadre in its bid for power.

Current Power Alignments

The succession struggle has been under way in earnest at least since Chou's death without any faction having gained

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the upper hand. A rough balance still seems to exist among the various contending factions in the Politburo.

The leftist campaign has been muted in recent months, and the loss of Mao may be another setback. Nevertheless, two of the four Politburo Standing Committee members are leftists--Party Vice Chairman Wang Hung-wen and Chang Ch'un-ch'iao, who holds important party, government, and military posts. Outside the Politburo--in the state bureaucracy, the PLA, and a majority of provincial structures--the left is probably weaker than other factions, but it remains influential in the media and mass organizations and among younger cadre.

Moderate elements have no doubt been buoyed by the recent stress on order and production and will undoubtedly harp on the need for unity and consolidation in the wake of Mao's passing. However, they have been without a leader since the death of Chou and the purge of Teng. Yeh Chien-ying, Party Vice-Chairman and Minister of Defense, is the only moderate on the Standing Committee, and at 77 he is hardly likely to assume an important leadership role.

Premier Hua Kuo-feng, though still a largely unknown quantity, may be trying to assume a pivotal role among competing factions. He is Party First Vice-Chairman and as such is a top contender for the Chairmanship. Indeed, earthquake-relief activities have given him the opportunity to build a positive popular image.

True to his past political performance, Hua has balanced moderate and radical statements in recent public speeches, but he has clearly come down in favor of law and order and increased production. He may be trying to establish himself as a national figure similar to Chou, somewhat above factional squabbles and able to bargain with all sides. He has a long way to go, however, and is not yet secure in his position as Premier.

The current alignment of the PLA and its top leaders is not clear. While the left reportedly has a few important military supporters, the PLA has generally resisted leftist attempts to involve it deeply in the anti-Teng campaign, especially regarding criticism of Teng's military line. The weight of past experience suggests that the military as a whole will come down in favor of stability

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and order. Indeed, as the more moderate line evolved in recent weeks, the PLA received high praise for its "heroic" earthquake-relief activities.

Of the active military figures, Vice Premier and Politburo member Ch'en Hsi-lien will have a pivotal role in the succession. He reportedly oversees defense-related industries as well as the day-to-day affairs of the party's Military Commission. Some evidence suggests that he may lean to the moderates.

Short-Term Prospects

In the near future, apparent harmony and order can be expected, but the possibility of a relatively open power struggle, such as developed when Teng was removed after Chou's death, cannot be ruled out completely. The anti-Teng campaign has fostered serious divisions at all levels and will exacerbate problems of developing a stable leadership.

Mao's death should bring at least a public show of leadership unity. All factions appear committed to a united China and presumably will try to avoid an open split. Nevertheless, the temptation to publicize any struggle in order to garner support will be great. In this regard, the funeral and mourning period may provide excellent opportunities to claim Mao's support for various points of view.

There are several possible leadership alignments in the near term:

A collegial leadership led by individuals acceptable to major factions and institutions is the most likely development. Such a collective coalition might emerge if the left, which has not succeeded in its anti-Teng campaign, still retains enough clout to discourage a counter-campaign. Top positions would be divided among the major factions and interest groups. Hua Kuo-feng, Chang Ch'un-ch'iao, and Ch'en Hsi-lien constitute a possible triumvirate. Responsibilities would be split fairly evenly among various factions. Maneuvering for dominance would likely continue behind the scenes and a single prominent leader probably would not emerge for some time. It is doubtful that this coalition would undertake any significant policy changes.

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A Moderate-Leaning Coalition. If the recent more moderate line of the campaign presages a real reassertion of moderate strength, a new coalition of moderates, PLA men, and centrists (such as Hua) could emerge. Such a coalition would tend to stress production, utilize material incentives, promote law and order, and encourage the importation of foreign technology.

The left might have little choice but to join such a government; it would continue as a vocal minority but without Mao's protection. More pragmatic leftists like Chang Ch'un-ch'iao presumably would try to expand their appeal and retain an important voice in the leadership.

If the left felt threatened by growing moderate unity and power in such a moderate coalition, it might well look to extra-party organizations to press its positions. But a formidable coalition of civilian state and party bureaucrats and many PLA commanders would probably coalesce to oppose such maneuvers.

A Left-Leaning Coalition. If despite recent setbacks the left is able to attract Politburo centrists or perhaps PLA men to its side, it may be able to use its key positions to dominate a new national lineup. As in 1967, when Chang Ch'un-ch'iao led leftists in a takeover of Shanghai, the left would need to moderate some of its views in order to attract support and begin to expand its influence in state, provincial, and PLA structures. Such a coalition would emphasize ideology and self-reliance more than either of the above-described coalitions and would probably seek to distance the PRC from both the US and the USSR.

A Deadlocked and Polarized Leadership. If neither the left nor the right shows a willingness to compromise its position in the near future and if both retain significant strength, a stalemated government unable to act could result. In this situation, widespread disorder on the scale of the Cultural Revolution could occur. The military might then play the deciding role and step in to restore order.

Domestic Issues

The leadership struggle will continue to be manifested in serious debates, primarily over domestic issues. Among the most contentious issues in recent months have been:

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- Legitimacy of Cultural Revolution. Debate centers around the general validity of the Cultural Revolution--the disruptive means used, the institutions and practices created, and related personnel promotions and demotions. This is the left's most important issue because many younger and middle cadre (including Premier Hua) rose as a result of the Cultural Revolution's purges.
- Promotion of Youth. Debate here focuses on the principle of bringing young cadres into the leadership. The left favors a three-way balance of young, middle, and old cadres, with more rapid promotion of able young cadres.
- Economic Policy. The perennial red versus expert issue and the question of local autonomy versus central control are major points of contention here. The moderates, with their stress on production and material incentives, enjoy considerable popular support on these issues.
- Military Modernization and Resource Allocation. Though this subject has not been clearly addressed in public, moderates and the PLA have supported the 1975 military modernization plan (which has been ascribed to Teng). There are indications that some leftists are opposed to at least part of the plan.

Foreign Policy Issues

Basic continuity in China's foreign policy is expected. All signs point to general agreement within the PRC leadership on China's strategy of anti-Sovietism and improved relations with the West, which had Mao's strong endorsement. There is no evidence that foreign policy issues have been central to the recent leadership struggle.

Since the succession struggle began in earnest with Chou's death in January, Peking has responded rapidly and with apparent unity to international developments. It appears that the leadership has successfully isolated foreign policy from domestic political maneuvering. Concern about possible Soviet efforts to intervene in China's succession also forms a powerful constraint on open disagreement and indecision.

Nevertheless, evidence indicates that the left leans toward a more chauvinistic foreign policy stance which

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would place China more equidistant from both superpowers. Recognizing that a "self-reliant" foreign policy can have broad appeal to nationalist sentiment in China, the left may well seek to capitalize on issues related to Chinese sovereignty. This has already been reflected, for example, in the foreign trade context, with attacks on policies which threaten to tie China's resources and economy too closely to Japan and the West.

The left feels particularly strongly about issues involving national territory and sovereignty, and a left-leaning coalition would be more inclined than would either a moderate or a collegial one to press the US hard to break its ties with Taiwan. Furthermore, a left-leaning coalition would be the least likely of all three to make a positive response to reiterated Soviet offers to improve relations, which are likely to follow Mao's death.

Prepared by E. A. Wayne
x22265

Approved by H. E. Horowitz
x21338

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